

Earl Raab

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YOU CAN DO SOMETHING

Last week, in preparation for a trip to Israel, I went to the Federal Building to get my passport renewed. There were some *pro forma* items on the brief questionnaire, but no one seriously questioned the nature of the trip, or whether I was going to return.

If I had indicated that I was going to Israel or England or Italy in order to stay there permanently and become a citizen of that country, the passport would still have been issued. That would have been my private business, not the business of the U.S. government.

One could not help but think of the tens of thousands of Soviet Jews- among others- who would have liked to have been able to pick up a passport in that casual manner. And one could not help but think of Anatoly Shcharansky who-among-others - is in a Soviet prison just because he wanted such a passport; and who is now on a hunger strike for the same reason.

There are many ways one could compare the state of human rights in two different countries. ~~The number of political prisoners or the amount of public criticism allowed could be compared; but repressive states try to~~ ^{But} ~~obscure those facts.~~ The easiest way to distinguish between a free and a slave society is to see whether their citizens can normally leave the country without hinderance. The policy of the United States- or Israel- can be starkly compared with the policy of the Soviet Union - or East Germany.

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In 1973, Anatoly Shcharansky, a law-abiding Soviet citizen, aged 25, applied for permission to leave the Soviet Union. For several preceding years, as the result of a courageous campaign by Soviet Jews, and a supporting commotion around the world, the Soviet Union had altered its "no-exit" policy to allow some Soviet citizens, mainly Jews, to be reunited with relatives in their ancestral homeland.

Over a quarter of a million Jews have left the Soviet Union under that policy, an unprecedented movement in Soviet history. ^{But} Three years ago the thought was expressed here that the Soviet Union was trying to get rid of its Jews- that is, those who identified themselves as Jews. There was an old tradition of European countries trying to make themselves *judenrein*, and four to five thousand Jews were being allowed to emigrate every month.

That thought was apparently mistaken. The emigration gates are virtually closed, only two or three hundred being allowed to emigrate each month. Perhaps Soviet policy-makers ^{ONCE} thought that if they could get rid of the main troublemakers, things would settle down. But hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews still have indicated their desire to leave.

Even in the midst of the greatest emigration flow, there had been "refuseniks" - individuals whose visa requests had been rejected for long periods- and who were punished in various ways. This was to remind the Soviet people that there was risk involved. Especially punished, for that symbolic purpose, were those who went public in their demands for emigration rights.

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Anatoly Shcharansky went public and gave symbolic leadership to Soviet Jewry. In 1978, he was sentenced to 13 years in prison for speaking out for emigration rights. Now gravely ill, he has begun a hunger strike in his Christopol prison cell.

Anatoly Shcharansky is a man who is being destroyed. He is also, tragically, a symbol and a testing ground. For the Soviet Union, one test is whether the world cares any more about either this man or this issue.

It is a time when you can make a difference. Avital Shcharansky, Anatoly's wife, is scheduled to speak at the Simchat Torah Soviet Jewry march and rally this Sunday, October 17. Gather at noon at the Jewish Community Center at 3200 California Street, to march to the Soviet Consulate at 2790 Green Street, where the rally will take place at one o'clock. The Soviet Union will be watching; and so will Anatoly Shcharansky.